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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001594

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2017

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SUBJECT: ILLEGAL AFGHANS DEPORTED FROM IRAN FACE DIFFICULT
CONDITIONS/TRIGGER POLITICAL CRISIS

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Classified By: PolCounselor SRosenberry for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Since April 21, Iranian authorities have deported approximately 52,000 Afghans living and working illegally in Iran. UNHCR estimates that there are as many as one million illegal Afghans in Iran in addition to the approximately 920,000 Afghan refugees registered there. IOM conducted an assessment mission to the transit center established by the GOA near Zarany in Nimooz Province on May 11-12 and reports that local mullahs along with provincial and central government agencies are providing for the approximately 5,000 deportees in the center at any one time. According to IOM, some deportees are arriving with signs of abuse. IOM reports that mullahs and provincial and central government officials are providing adequate shelter, food and health care at the transit centers during the deportees, short stay (up to 48 hours), but there are serious concerns about where and how they will be absorbed by communities in Afghanistan. While the Government of Iran had signaled its intent to return the illegal workers, the timing of the action and the methods used invite speculation that it was intended as a message to the Government of Afghanistan. End Summary.

Fair Warning by Iran on Deportations

¶2. (SBU) On January 21, Iranian authorities announced their plan to "regularize" illegal Afghan nationals residing in Iran. They made clear that this would not apply to the 920,000 Afghan refugees registered with UNHCR and the

government of Iran. Those Afghans residing illegally were encouraged to return to Afghanistan before April 21 after which they would be deported. During this period, a number of consultations took place between the two governments.

¶3. (SBU) On April 21, the GOI did, indeed, begin to deport large numbers of Afghan "illegals." As of May 6, 48,000 Afghans had been deported back to Afghanistan. Following a joint UNAMA/UNHCR assessment mission in Farah on May 5-6, the International Organization on Migration (IOM) was given responsibility for the issue and conducted an assessment mission in Nimooz on May 11-12.

¶4. (SBU) As of May 12, approximately 32,000 Afghans had been deported through the Milak/Zarani crossing point (Nimroz province) and another 16,000 through the Islam Qala checkpoint (Herat). As many as 50 percent of the deportees going through the Milak crossing are reported to be families. Those being deported through the Islam Qala are, by and large, single males. The majority of the deportees) as high as 90 percent - are from Afghanistan's Farah province, with the remainder mainly from Nimroz province.

Leading to Rough Return for those Affected

¶5. (SBU) The deportations have been executed by Iran's Disciplinary and Special Forces. While some report being taken from their homes at night, the bulk of the deportees were reportedly rounded up at work. Often they had no time to collect personal belongings and/or notify their families. This has resulted in many families being left behind while the principle "breadwinner" has been deported with nothing. IOM reports that many of the deportees are clearly traumatized

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by the experience they have been through, and there are clear signs that some have been subject to excessive force. Deportees have also been required to pay for a laissez-passer and for their transport costs. There have been only two reported cases of individuals holding refugee documents among the deportees, but IOM reports that some legitimate refugees, who were not carrying their documents, appear to be among the deportees. IOM reports that some of those in the centers acknowledge they had been warned of the pending deportations but, after years in Iran, did not take the announcement seriously. A few families complain about having left behind buried family members, a principle which they claim violates their religious rights.

Transit Camps Coping for Now

¶6. (SBU) On the Afghan side of the border, Afghan and international agencies responded to the influx by establishing transit centers. IOM reports that adequate, if basic, shelter, food and health care is being provided to the approximately 5,000 deportees in the the transit center near Zarani at any one time. The returnees are allowed to spend up to 48 hours in the camp and are, in most cases, moving on by the deadline.

¶7. (SBU) According to the IOM, the conditions are adequate for the short-run. The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has provided 15 tents. Local authorities provide water to the compound where 4 tankers (200-300 liters) have been installed. Food is provided twice daily to deportees by local communities, organized by mullahs. ARCS health staff regularly visit the compound. Three doctors from the Ministry of Public Health are present and are providing good care, including polio inoculations to all children. Four latrines are available. According to the IOM, WFP is prepared to provide foodstuffs, but the ANA may need help moving portable kitchens to the center to allow for its

preparation.

Long-Term Prospects

¶8. (SBU) IOM expresses concern both about the ability of the ability of Farah and Nimroz Provinces, two of Afghanistan's poorest areas, to absorb the sudden influx of families and workers. There is virtually no legitimate employment, and the security implications of thousands of discontented unemployed young men in these provinces is more than troubling.

Political Sub-themes and Fallout

¶9. (C) Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation Ustid Mohammad Akbar lost a no-confidence vote in parliament on May 10 following tough questioning on the government's failure to prevent or at least plan for the large-scale deportations. The outcome of a no-confidence vote against Foreign Minister Spanta, on the same issue, is uncertain pending a ruling by the Supreme Court on possible procedural irregularities (Septel). Members of Parliament and diplomatic colleagues agree that the deportee issue, even if handled clumsily by both Akbar and Spanta (especially in terms of the interaction with Parliament) provided an excuse for domestic and foreign opponents to go after Spanta in particular.

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¶10. (C) There is ongoing confusion in the Afghanistan regarding the legal status of the deportees. They continue to be referred to as "refugees" rather than economic migrants or illegal residents. While Iran had the right to deport most if not all of the Afghans who have been returned, the timing and manner in which they did so fuels speculation that it is meant as a tough message to the Afghan government (and possibly particularly to Spanta) about Iran's ability to make life more complicated and difficult.
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